

executive development:

AN OLD IDEA, A NEW MANDATE

EXECUTIVE development has been defined as "the process by which managers and potential managers are identified, selected, and systematically developed for maximum effectiveness in their present positions or for positions of greater managerial responsibility." A fine, bureaucratic definition, and it speaks to a process that takes place inevitably, if not always systematically. Managers are identified and selected every

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day; unfortunately it is not often that they are developed for maximum effectiveness.

Too frequently a managerial vacancy is like a vacuum: Someone moves in to fill it because it is there. Because such vacancies

somehow do get filled, the view has evolved that executive development is expendable, something easily dispensed with when budgets are tight (and when are budgets not tight?).

But the complex demands inherent in managing today's Federal bureaucracy cannot adequately be met by chance. A more sophisticated process than chance, expediency, crisis management, or some other unplanned, unorgan-

ized approach is needed. With President Carter's signing of Executive Order 12027, blandly titled "Relating to the Transfer of Certain Executive Development and Other Personnel Functions," in December 1977, the Civil Service Commission has a new, expanded role in assuring that executive development meets today's needs. More of this new role in a moment.

Two Decades of Executive Development

First, let us briefly review highlights of what's been done to systematize Federal executive development over the past 20 years. It is not a very long or involved recitation. Though it avoided direct reference to executive development, the Government Employees Training Act of 1958 provided for keeping key employees "well abreast of scientific, professional, technical, and management developments both in and out of Government." In 1963, the first of three Civil Service Commission Executive Seminar Centers was established at Kings Point, N.Y. President Johnson signed Executive Order 11315 establishing the Executive Assignment System in 1966, which, among other things, directed the Commission to recommend a program for training and development of career executives. In 1968, the Federal Executive Institute at Charlottesville, Va., was established by Presidential order to meet training needs of Federal executives at grades GS-16 and above.

Early in 1971, a Presidential memorandum called upon Federal agencies to establish executive development programs and directed OMB and the Civil Service Commission to jointly encourage a Federal executive development effort. Later that same year, an OMB circular and the Commission's Federal Personnel Manual Letter 412-1 were issued in re-

sponse to this Presidential directive.

In 1973, the Commission's Bureau of Executive Personnel (then the Bureau of Executive Manpower, but there is a new consciousness abroad in the land!) established the Executive Personnel Technical Assistance Center to serve as the Commission's clearinghouse for executive development information and assistance. The first Federal Executive Development Program, a Government-wide pilot program for 25 GS-15's with high management potential, was announced that same year. Variations of this pilot program were announced in 1974, 1976, and late 1977, each differing from its predecessors as part of an effort to find the most effective approach. Executive development received additional impetus in 1976 from President Ford's budget message for FY 1977, directing agencies to "strengthen their internal programs of executive selection and training."

We have, in summary, a 20-year history of Federal acknowledgment that executive development has utility, plus a number of uncoordinated actions or directives aimed at fostering some positive movement. What has been lacking these 20 years has been a systematic approach and unified direction. Leadership has been so divided between CSC and OMB that neither agency was truly in charge. The result was summarized accurately by Hugh Heclo in his recent book, "A Government of Strangers." He wrote, "With the exception of a few efforts confined to certain agencies, the overall executive development program can be rated a failure in its attempt to generate groups of more broadly experienced and more organizationally mobile career executives." Efforts in this area, Heclo stated, "have remained undermanned, underfunded, and politically undersupported."

A New Mandate

The signing on December 5, 1977, of Executive Order 12027 heralded a new, systematic, unified approach to executive development. This order delegates directly to the Civil Service Commission "overall executive branch leadership, regulation, and guidance in executive personnel selection, development, and management." Related functions, staff, and appropriations (formerly divided between the Commission and OMB) are now centrally focused in the Civil Service Commission. Responsibility for leadership—not simply of developmental functions, but for the total management of executive resources — has been clearly and fully placed in a single agency for the first time. Now the authority exists that will allow the Commission to systematically begin planning for the integration of executive development with overall executive resource management. The Executive order is a mandate for the Commission to move to meet a number of Federal needs.

New Needs (and Old) To Be Met

What Federal needs can be met in whole or in part by an executive development program?

Continuity, for one. The average age of Federal managers in grades GS-15/18 is about 52. Within 4 years more than half of them will be eligible for retirement. It is obviously not too soon to ask what is being done to assure that trained, competent managers will be available to fill the inevitable breach.

Upward mobility, for another. Despite affirmative action to recruit women and minorities for executive positions, we can take no pride in our present level of accomplishment. Of the total population of GS-15/18 positions, only about 6 percent are filled by

minorities, and about 10 percent women. If women and minorities are to fill leadership positions without compromising the merit system or diluting the quality of leadership, affirmative development programs reaching them are essential.

Most Federal managers came up through the ranks, building on narrow professional specialties: financial management, a scientific expertise, or some other narrowly defined discipline. Such tight technical focus breeds substantial technical skills, but often leaves little time for developing managerial skills such as decisionmaking, budgeting, dealing with a broad range of people, or coping with the political environment. In short, the technical expert may flounder as a manager—unless he has had the chance to learn systematically how to manage. And helping managers learn to manage is one way an executive development program can pay off.

The increasing complexity of Government provides another rationale for more and better executive development. New technologies, social and economic changes, increased public expectation and demand for Government services, shifting national priorities, public awareness, and a myriad of other interrelated factors combine to make the delivery of effective Government services far more complex now than ever before.

This trend is certain to continue because the job of managing Federal agencies and programs has become—and will continue to be—more demanding. We cannot simply assume Federal managers will rise to the task. We need to make certain that they do not remain too involved in stamping out the day-to-day fires licking at their feet. They must have time and opportunity to step back, renew themselves, learn what's going on beyond their immediate jobs, and

ways the managerial role is played.

This need for comprehensive executive development is more generally accepted, more clearly seen today than at any time in the past two decades. The present administration fully supports it. There is considerable Congressional dissatisfaction with the status quo. Executive Order 12027 has clearly placed responsibility for executive development in the Civil Service Commission. As this article goes to press, legislation proposing a new Senior Executive Service is being prepared for Congressional consideration. If passed, this legislation is likely to require that Federal executives and managers be better prepared and more capable than ever before. For all these reasons, a systematic approach to executive development is timely now.

New Initiatives

What initiatives can we expect the Commission to take? First, we can expect a total commitment to affirmative action, aimed at increasing the role of women and minorities in managing the Federal Government. Certifying public managers with a proposed Senior Executive Service, cooperation

local governments, more technical assistance at the agency level, direct confrontation with the roadblocks impeding improved executive development—all are being studied or implemented. Let us discuss some of these plans and proposals in greater detail.

Affirmative Action

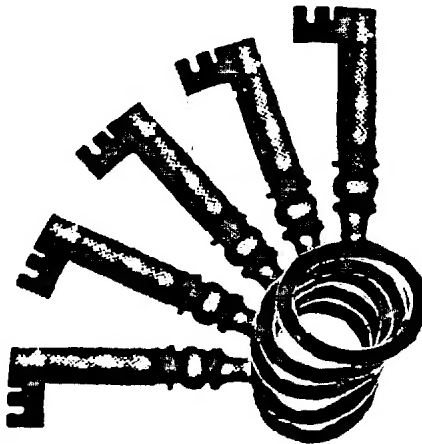
Affirmative action underlies all the Commission's planning for executive development. For example, in his December 12, 1977, letter to heads of executive branch departments and agencies announcing the fourth Federal Executive Development Program, CSC Chairman Campbell wrote:

"This Administration is committed to the twin goals of a better managed Federal Government and a Federal executive work force which is more representative of the diversity of the American public. Systematic executive development efforts can help obtain both goals. . . ." He went on to say that it is crucial for top managers to take "positive action to identify women and minority employees who meet the requirements of this program and to ensure that they are included in open merit competition."

In a Federal Personnel Manual Letter titled "Selecting Participants for Executive Development Programs," agencies have been directed to look beyond traditional career patterns, to be sure that all talented, effective employees are considered for executive development. There will be no slackening of this concern.

Systems Concept

Executive development has been viewed over the years as independent of planning, staffing, and other phases of executive resources management. Indeed, many people



have viewed executive development as no more than classroom training for present or potential executives. We believe, rather, that executive development is the *total* process of assuring for an organization a supply of sufficient highly competent executives to provide leadership in both the present and the future. This assurance requires that executive development begin with a determination of need and an assessment of the work force. The process must go on to identify potential managers, must provide opportunity for the development of that potential, and must ensure that talent once developed is used. Finally, the process must help executives keep abreast of new developments and provide assistance in overcoming any shortcomings in their managerial performance.

To this end, the Commission is updating the Federal Personnel Manual. FPM Supplement 305-1, originally dating from the advent of the Executive Assignment System in 1966, is being revised and broadened. In its newest version, this supplement presents executive development as a single, coordinated system, incorporating planning and staffing as well as development per se under the general title, "Executive Resources Management." Drafted before the signing of E.O. 12027, it anticipates the increased emphasis now being placed upon the total concept and practice of executive development in the Federal Government.

Legislation is now being prepared that would bring most GS-16, 17 and 18 Federal managers, as well as Executive Levels V and IV, into a Senior Executive Service (SES). As this Service is envisioned, it will require that candidates have their managerial qualifications for career entry certified by the Commission or a successor organization. Under this plan, completion of a systematic executive development program or successful performance of managerial duties would be a prerequisite for entry into the SES. An approved executive development program could involve formal classroom training and developmental work experiences.

Should the SES proposal become law, we will have, for the first time, a clear legislative mandate for executive development. Agencies will find it necessary to provide executive development programs. Executives, incumbent and aspiring, will find participation in executive development activities necessary. No longer will it be possible to place highly specialized individuals in managerial roles without any attention to their ability to manage. Managerial ability no longer will be thought of as something that will emerge

once an individual is asked to manage.

Some form of managerial certification appears to hold promise as an integral part of a fully operating executive management program. Should it come to pass as part of the SES (or in some other form), executive development will be the basis of promoting and placing Federal managers.

The Key: Management Support

The disincentives to executive development are well known, and have been with us for a long time. The key to resolving most of them is management support.

If top management of an agency wants strong executive development, believes it is necessary for the agency's long-run effectiveness, and conveys that attitude, then strong executive development will follow. And that is perhaps the principal significance of the Presidential mandate given the Civil Service Commission by E.O. 12027. It gives the Commission new leverage to convince agency management that executive development is more than cosmetic. It demonstrates the administration's commitment to the proposition that executive development is good government, good management, good for employee morale, a good approach to affirmative action—and when all the scores are in, good for the achievement of program objectives.

